

CliffsNotes.com® At a Glance for **THE HUNGER GAMES**

In Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games*, the Capitol forces each of Panem's 12 districts to choose two teenagers to participate in the Hunger Games, a gruesome, televised fight to the death.

The novel begins on the day of the reaping in District 12. The reaping is a nerve-wracking time because it determines which boy and girl between the ages of 12 to 18 will be tributes for their district. The tributes are sent to an arena to play the Hunger Games, a brutal competition in which they fight until only one tribute remains alive.

The Games, which are put on by the Capitol, are meant to punish the 12 districts, as well as to remind them of the Dark Days, when the 13th district was obliterated for its uprising against the tyrannical and cruel Capitol.

At the reaping, Katniss Everdeen's younger sister is selected to be District 12's girl tribute for the 74th Hunger Games. However, Katniss volunteers to take her sister's place. Peeta Mellark, a boy Katniss's age and the son of the baker, is selected as District 12's boy tribute.

Before she leaves for the Hunger Games, Katniss receives a mockingjay pin and says goodbye to her friend Gale, for whom her feelings are conflicted, wavering between friendship and love.

As the 74th Hunger Games, the tributes stand in a circle around the metal Cornucopia, a giant golden horn that holds supplies and weapons, meant to lure the tributes in for a bloodbath. While in the arena, Katniss battles hunger, dehydration, the other tributes, and the Gamemakers, who are able to send violent fires and explosions through the arena.

After half of the tributes die, the Games' announcer declares a new rule: This year, two tributes can win so long as they come from the same district. Katniss sets out to find Peeta, who has been badly injured by another tribute. She finds him camouflaged in mud and in bad shape. Katniss nurses Peeta back to health. In order to win the audience over Katniss acts like she is in love with Peeta — who earlier admitted in an interview that he loved Katniss.

Soon, The Gamemakers force the streams and ponds in the arena to dry up, forcing the remaining tributes to head for the lake near the Cornucopia. Katniss and Peeta go to the Cornucopia to wait for Cato, the only other tribute still alive. Cato emerges from the woods being chased by muttations (, creatures made by the Capitol. The animals catch Cato, and Katniss shoots him with her arrow to end his suffering.

Katniss and Peeta believe the Games are over, but then Games' announcer voice announces that the new rule that was previously established about two tributes winning has been revoked. Only one tribute can win.

CliffsNotes.com® At a Glance for THE HUNGER GAMES

Katniss realizes that this has been the Gamemakers' plan all along – to end with the star-crossed lovers and watch one of them sacrifice his or her life for the other. Katniss, however, comes up with a plan. Both she and Peeta prepare to eat poisonous berries, which makes Claudius take back his most recent announcement, stating that two tributes can indeed win and declaring Katniss and Peeta this year's Hunger Games winners.

After the Games, Katniss wonders if Peeta might truly love her. At the novel's end, Katniss isn't sure who she is now that she's a victor in the Hunger Games. She also doesn't know whom she loves, Gale or Peeta, or where her life will go from here with the Capitol's eyes closely upon her.

Written by: Suzanne Collins

Type of Work: novel

Genres: action; science fiction

First Published: 2008

Setting: Panem; post-apocalyptic world

Main Characters: Katniss Everdeen; Peeta Mellark; Gale Hawthorne; Prim; Haymitch Abernathy; Effie Trinket; Cinna; Rue

Major Thematic Topics: masks; deception; identity; manipulation; rebellion; reality versus the Games

Motifs: war

Major Symbols: mockingjay; the poisonous berries

Movie Versions: *The Hunger Games* (2012)

CliffsNotes.com® At a Glance for **THE HUNGER GAMES**

The three most important aspects of *The Hunger Games*:

- The premise of *The Hunger Games* is heavily influenced by the Greek myth of Theseus and the Minotaur. To punish Athens for the death of a son, King Minos of Crete demanded a tribute of seven maidens and seven youths, drawn by lot, every nine years to be sacrificed to the Minotaur. Theseus volunteers to be a tribute and slay the beast. Katniss represents Theseus in a post-apocalyptic world.
- *The Hunger Games* is set in a post-apocalyptic *dystopia* called Panem. A *dystopia* is an imagined world that is far worse than our own, as opposed to a *utopia*, which is an ideal place or state. Other novels that take place in dystopian worlds include Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, and George Orwell's *Animal Farm* and *1984*.
- Before leaving for the Games, Katniss receives a mockingjay pin from a friend for luck. The mockingjay is a recurring symbol throughout the novel. It is a slap in the face to the Capitol, since the mockingjay is the result of a mutation attempt gone awry. By wearing this pin, Katniss reminds the Capitol of one of their failed experiments. The mockingjay also symbolizes the failed revolution that caused the Capitol to start the Hunger Games, years ago.